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ABSTRACT

At Michigan State University, a "hands on" approach to the advertising campaigns course has proven successful. The course is limited to 25 students who work in groups of five to develop and prepare an advertising campaign for a client who has agreed to provide information and funds for the course and who in return will get a plans book and recommendations from each of the groups. The teacher acts primarily as a consultant to each group, meeting with them separately throughout the course. A major problem was that the quarter system did not allow enough time to investigate and fully develop a campaign for the clients. It was decided to combine the advertising campaigns course and the advertising research course into a two-term sequence. This allowed students to develop a strong research base, to pretest creative approaches, to produce more creative campaigns, and to rehearse their presentations. The extended course also permitted better financing of the projects. This approach has worked well for the department, for students, and for the clients. (TJ)

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TEACHING THE ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS COURSE FOR FUN AND PROFIT

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Introduction

In most advertising sequences, there is a nebulous course titled "Advertising Campaigns." Unfortunately, in many instances the content of the course varies widely from school to school and even from instructor to instructor. There is the "let them get their hands dirty" approach in which students actually develop advertising campaigns in a "real world" setting for actual clients. In other courses, the content may consist of case studies or analysis of existing campaigns. And, there are those in-betweens usually of the textbook type where students develop advertising and promotional approaches for fictitious companies which are then either judged by the faculty or their peers. There are advantages to each method and strong supporters for each approach. In most cases, it appears the "Advertising Campaigns" course is taught by the instructor in the way which is traditional for his school or the one in which he (or she) feels most comfortable, and not necessarily in the most effective manner for student learning.

This paper reflects one viewpoint and one approach. Perhaps, however, it reflects a philosophy of an advertising program. In most instances, the "Advertising Campaigns" course tells more about an advertising sequence in a university than almost any other single course. It reflects the commitment of the faculty, or at least the course instructors, to a general approach to the teaching of advertising. More basically, however, it mirrors the opportunity for the student to learn about advertising in a particular course of instruction.

The approach to the "Advertising Campaigns" course described on the following pages is the one which has been used in the Department of Advertising at Michigan State University for a number of years. It appears to be successful although there is no known method of gathering empirical evidence to support this contention. While the general concept of

the "Advertising Campaigns" course has been the same over the years, the approach, like advertising, has been subject to revisions and improvements. While we have what we believe is a successful formula, rather dramatic changes and adjustments have been made in the structure of the course in the past year. Our new method appears to be achieving our goal of giving students a practical experience in creating an advertising campaign in a situation that is as "real world" as we can make it. Perhaps it has implications and applications for other advertising departments or sequences.

The Basic Model

The "Advertising Campaigns" course at MSU has traditionally been the capstone course in the curriculum. It is required of all majors and carries several prerequisites. Unfortunately, in the past the prerequisites were not enforced as strictly as they might have been. Generally, however, the student composition of the course has been seniors in their last or next-to-last quarter in the program.

The general approach to the course has been a hands-on, working experience with a real-life client. Companies or organizations have been selected or solicited by the faculty to offer their products or services as "projects" for the students. Participants in these projects have ranged from such major national advertisers as Chrysler, Seven-Up and Whirlpool to such local organizations as banks and real estate companies. In each instance, the sponsoring organization contributed a sum of money to the Department of Advertising. This amount was usually based on what the faculty member thought was equitable or what the company thought was fair. These contributed funds were then used to help defray the costs of the campaigns developed by the students, such as slides, artwork, printing of plans books, etc.

The final result of the course has been the development and execution of an advertising campaign for the sponsoring client in the form of a plans book and a formal presentation by the students.

Course Organization

Traditionally, course enrollment has been limited to 25 students for any one project. While there may be multiple projects during any one term, through trial and error, we have found that a group of 25 divided into five groups of five members each works best.

Four is too few and six is too many, thus the multiple of five.

There is no pre-selection procedure for the course and since it is required, we get all types of students with various skills and interests. Each group of five students is determined by the instructor who evaluates such items as GPA, area of interest such as media, creative, account management, etc. and proper allocation of art talent. Every attempt is made to equalize the composition of the groups in terms of skills and abilities. The only student input is a list of other students in the course with which they would not like to work. We've found that pre-existing conflicts really blossom in a course requiring as much teamwork as this. We try to avoid these situations if possible.

Once the groups have been formed, usually by the second class period, they are autonomous. They work together at their own pace, set up their own meeting times outside of regularly scheduled class periods and organize who will do what. Classroom instruction in the course is limited. The instructor meets with the entire class on a rather limited number of occasions after the first two weeks. Usually these lecture or discussion sessions are to review and explain the steps in proper advertising campaign organization and execution.

Under our program, the instructor in the "Advertising Campaigns" course acts more as a consultant than a teacher. Students have been exposed to all the areas of campaign development in previous courses. We believe it is now time for them to tie all the materials and information they have been given in the past two years into a package, relating one concept to another. In this instance, the instructor's primary purpose is to assure the individual groups moving at the proper pace and prevent any from heading off on a tangent or following a course which is obviously dead-end. Working with five groups requires that the instructor be impartial and close-mouthed. There is great competition among the groups and a slip by the instructor could give away the campaign plans of a group to their competition.

As indicated above, the instructor primarily meets with the groups on an individual basis once the campaign formation has begun. These meetings are scheduled during regular classroom times but several additional meetings are also required. Meetings are used to have the group report on their activities and plans. This gives the instructor an

opportunity to evaluate the group's progress and assure they are advancing at the proper rate.

To insure that the ultimate objective of an advertising campaign is achieved, a schedule of campaign development steps are established at the beginning of the course. Deadlines are set for each phase of the project. This schedule is detailed in the next section but, primarily, it is designed to insure that all campaign plans and materials are included in the final product. We've found that students, even at this level, still need a basic format to follow since this is usually their first, unstructured learning situation.

As previously stated, the final goal of the course is the development and preparation of an advertising campaign for the client. This takes the form of a plans book which is a written summary of the situation which the company faces and the recommendations which the group has developed. In addition, formal presentations of the recommendations are required of each group so that they have an opportunity to present and defend their proposed program. The actual organization of the course will perhaps give a better idea of how this is done.

Course Organization

The organization of the course begins with the selection of the client by the instructor. It is usually necessary for the instructor to meet with the participating organization in advance and explain exactly how the course will operate and what will be the result. In addition, we've found that study of the client, the product or service category to be used and some information on the client is vital to the instructor. An uninformed instructor cannot successfully act in a consulting capacity no matter what his academic or practical experience.

Usually during the second week of classes, representatives from the sponsoring organization are invited to visit the campus to personally present the problem to the class. This is an important part of the course, and one which can often make or break a project at the beginning. The client must be prepared to give as much information and background on the task presented as possible, just as would be done with an advertising

agency or other consultant group. Lack of pertinent information or goals by the client usually shows up in the final campaign developed by the students. The client normally covers such areas as company information, historical data, any research material which might be available, sales and profit trends, geographic limitations of the campaign and the approximate budget. Since most organizations are unwilling to put actual sales and margin data into the hands of students, we suggest they develop general budget guidelines.

Following the presentation of the background information, the student groups then go to work developing their recommendations. Typically, the areas included in such a recommendation are:

A. Situation Analysis

B. Advertising Goals and Objectives

C. Target Market Selection

D. Creative Executions and Rationale

E. Media Plan and Spending Pattern

F. Total Budget Allocation and Rationale

G. Method of Evaluating Recommendations

H. Conclusions and Summary

In all, the campaign the students prepare is quite comprehensive, or at least as comprehensive as can be accomplished in a ten week term.

The development of the recommended plan of action usually follows a rather direct course. Since most clients have limited amounts of information on the product or service for which the campaign is to be created, the research base for the project is tackled first. Students develop secondary data from library research. We have both TGI and Simmons data available in our library. They also use other sources such as trade publications, Sales Management "Survey of Buying Power," statistical abstracts and other ready references. Following this secondary data gathering, students are encouraged to develop some form of primary research information, although it is not required. Primary data gathering may take many forms but usually consists of focus group interviews, telephone surveys, mall intercepts, and other forms of rapid information gathering. Each group

generates its own research base on which they develop their campaign.

Using the research base, an advertising campaign is then developed by each group. The requirements for an advertising recommendation are quite comprehensive. Groups are required to develop rationales for the creative executions, media selection and allocation of the available budget.

The campaign development is summarized in an advertising plans book. The plans book includes the recommendations of the group and the implementation of the campaign. It fully supports and documents the plan which the group has developed. Copies of each group's plans book are given to the sponsoring client.

In addition to the plans book, each group is required to make a formal presentation of their recommendations to the client. To assure that each group is ready to present to the sponsoring client, a week prior to the actual presentation, the groups present to a selected group of the faculty. Presentations are limited to 30 minutes with an additional 15 minutes for questions and answers. In most instances, the critique by the faculty is much more demanding than that by the client. It primarily serves to sharpen up the presentations and assure that there are no gaping holes in the plan.

The presentation approach has been tried in two ways. Initially, we allowed all groups to present to the client. We found, however, that five hours of student presentations were more than most sponsors could take. As a result, based on the presentations to the faculty, the top two groups are selected to make client presentations. Although only two groups present, the client receives all the plans books and reviews them. While the presentation is important and the winning team usually comes from one of the two groups which present, the client reviews all the plans books and rates them according to a standard formula we have developed.

Following the client presentations, all groups meet one final time for two evaluations. First, each group is asked to evaluate the members of their team. This peer evaluation is vital since it is the only method the instructor has of learning the amount and value each student contributed to the group. Second, the instructor then reviews each presentation for the group and makes suggestions and recommendations on how the campaign or the

presentation might have been strengthened. We've found these evaluation sessions invaluable because students are anxious to know how and where their campaign and presentation could have been improved.

As stated at the beginning, the program outlined above has been used successfully at MSU for a number of years. But, like other areas of instruction, some inherent problems were found. During Spring Term, 1976, we set out to improve our "Advertising Campaigns" course... the problems we found in our previous method, the opportunities we believed possible and the steps we took follow.

Problems in the Approach and Implementation

For a "hands-on" approach to advertising campaign development, it might appear that the program we had been using would be satisfactory. Unfortunately, there were some inherent flaws in the approach and most of them had to do with time. We felt the quarter system at MSU just didn't allow sufficient time to investigate and fully develop an advertising campaign for our clients. To be more specific, we found that students spent more than half the term simply getting acquainted with the product, the market, the audience and the problems the product faced. By the time they had done the necessary backgrounding and research, little or no time was available for the development of the campaign. In some instances, a solid research base was developed, but little time was available for creative execution, media planning, budgeting, promotion and all the other things which go to make up a successful advertising campaign. One of the primary areas of concern was the creative product the students were developing. This appeared to be primarily a function of time constraints. Students didn't have sufficient time to develop a creative approach and pretest it in any form. As a result, the creative product was based on best guesses and "gut feel" ... neither of which is very successful with inexperienced students. Since our approach was not the way it was usually done in the "real world," we sought a method to give students an opportunity to have consumers review and comment on their executions prior to client presentation.

Finally, we weren't totally pleased with the presentation of the campaigns which students were making. Again, that old bugaboo, time, appeared to be the culprit. In

short, we were simply trying to do too much in too short a period of time. As a result, we were shortchanging both the students and the client. We knew our students could do a better job.

The Sequence Approach

Late last spring we developed an idea which seemed to make sense and which we felt might solve the problems which we faced in the "Advertising Campaigns" course. It involved sequencing that course with our Advertising Research course which is also offered at the senior level. The idea was to "lock" the two courses together for mutual benefit. The first term, students would enroll in the Advertising Research course. During that term, they would research the product or service as part of a term project. This would provide the research base for the "Advertising Campaigns" course which would follow the next term. In other words, we would turn what had been an "Advertising Campaigns" course into a sequence. This would give the students time to fully develop their ideas and approaches for the product on which they were working.

Generally, the idea provides us with what we felt were the following major advantages.

1. A Strong Research Base. Since the research would be conducted during a complete term, it would give students an opportunity to do the type of survey research usually conducted in the "real world" rather than limiting them to what could be done by a group of five people. We now had a minimum of 25 people available for the research project. Also, all groups would be using a common research base for the "Advertising Campaigns" course which followed next term.

During the past three terms in which we have sequenced the courses, students have conducted WATS line telephone consumption studies, mall intercepts, product placement tests, pre-and-post usage tests, metric multidimensional scaling studies using "Galileo" technique, focus groups and depth interviews. These research projects have been conducted not only on the campus but in Detroit, Grand Rapids and other cities.

2. The Opportunity to Pre-test Creative Approaches. With the added time available in the "Advertising Campaigns" section of the sequence, students now have an oppor-

tunity to pre-test their creative concepts and approaches with consumers. In most cases, these pre-tests have taken the form of mall intercepts, personal in-home interviews and other standard testing techniques. These pre-tests have given the students an opportunity to determine if their creative approaches convey the intended messages and if the sales points come through. This has proven to be one of the most beneficial parts of the program since students are now receiving actual consumer reactions to campaign ideas rather than feedback from faculty or other students.

3. More Creative Campaigns. The campaigns have improved not just in the creative product itself but in the overall approach to the problem. We've found students now are evaluating various media strategies rather than just saying "we'll run television spots and newspaper ads." We're finding more creative media planning and execution. Time and energy is devoted to merchandising and promotion possibilities. . .all areas that had received only cursory attention previously. In short, we've found more well-conceived, creative advertising campaigns than previous groups had time to develop.

4. Rehearsal of Presentations. The added time has greatly improved student presentation skills. There is now time for rehearsals, the development of slides, overheads and other visual aids. Presentations are much more polished and students have an opportunity to try and re-try new presentation ideas to achieve the best possible approach to sell their recommendations.

5. Financing of Projects. Last, but not least, we've developed a method of financing our Advertising Research and "Advertising Campaigns" course outside the University. As previously noted, we had requested a modest contribution to the Department when we had the single term "Advertising Campaigns" course. Usually the contribution of $200 to $400 made by clients in many cases didn't pay our out-of-pocket expenses when we counted all the materials used in the development of the various presentations by five groups.

With the new two-course sequence, our requested contribution was increased to $1,000 per term or a total of $2,000 for the development of the research base and the advertising campaign. With these additional funds, we can now buy computer time,

print questionnaires, pay mileage for out-of-town research trips, hire professional typing for reports and generally take a more professional, real-world approach in the research course.

In the "Advertising Campaigns" course, we now allocate each group a budget with which to develop their presentation. The budget is usually sufficient to pay for the cost of presentation materials and printing and binding of plans books. Student investment in the course has dropped from an estimated $35 to $40 each to approximately $10 each and in most cases, groups can produce their presentation and plans books within the money allocated to them.

Results of the New Approach

While the department has obviously received a number of benefits from the new sequenced program, students like the idea too. They feel more at ease working with a product on which they have some experience. They now start planning in the research sequence the approach they will consider in the campaigns portion. In short, students now look on research as a means to an end rather than a chore which has to be undertaken. In addition, we believe students are also gaining a better insight into what can and cannot be done with research than they previously had.

There's no question the advertising campaigns being developed under this new program are better conceived and more professionally prepared. The opportunity to pre-test ideas in the field is a tremendous improvement in our approach. Further, it gives the student an opportunity to make changes or adjustments based on these pre-tests prior to presentation. Both the campaigns and plans books have improved as have the actual presentations.

But, how about the clients? Are they happy? Our experience with the four clients we have served in this sequence has been excellent. All have been highly complimentary of the work the students have done. All feel they have more than received their investment back in information and creative thinking. One of the clients, for which the sequenced project has been completed, has completely readjusted his marketing approach based on the recommendations of the student research and campaign. Another client has abandoned a new advertising campaign after only a few months use when shown the low performance of the

commercials in the marketplace. Similarly, the second two clients have both received their research results at this point and both have been surprised at some of the findings. The implementation of a campaign will probably result in a major directional change for both of them based on the students' work.

Finally, we've managed to take the development of advertising research and campaigns out of the nickle-and-dime category at MSU and give students the financing they need to do the job they have been trained to do. So far, it has paid handsome dividends for all involved.

Summary

The hands-on, practical approach to teaching "Advertising Campaigns" appears to work best for us at Michigan State University. Preliminary results also indicate that the sequencing of our Advertising Research course and the "Advertising Campaigns" course has many advantages for both the student, faculty and the participating client.

Will this approach work in any school and in any advertising sequence? Quite honestly, we don't know. We do know that it requires 1) a commitment on the part of the administration to put up with all the headaches of keeping students in a two-course sequence, 2) a commitment on the part of the client to allow students to develop an advertising research base and campaign recommendation which requires approximately six months to complete, and 3) a strong commitment from the students to want a "real-world" advertising experience with all the additional work required. Primarily, though, the Michigan State University approach requires a deep commitment on the part of the faculty to provide the opportunity for the student to learn in a somewhat unique and unstructured setting. Fortunately, we have all these things at MSU. As a result, we have what we believe is a successful method of teaching the "Advertising Campaigns" course not only for fun but for profit.